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Revenue Bill

Speech of

Hon Charles H. Martin

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REVENUE BILL.

SPEECH

OF

HON. CHARLES H. MARTIN,
OF NORTH CAROLINA,

IN THE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

256
APRIL, 1898.

WASHINGTON.
1898.

Mr. W. A. Smith

C8498

SPEECH

OF

HON. CHARLES H. MARTIN.

On the bill (H. R. 10100) to provide ways and means to meet war expenditures.

Mr. MARTIN said:

Mr. SPEAKER: I have been a member of Congress for three years, and have never delivered a speech nor printed a single word in the RECORD; hence no man can justly charge me with having abused the privileges of the floor or the courtesy of the RECORD. Because I knew that other gentlemen could talk so much more forcibly and eloquently than myself, I have preferred to be a passive listener rather than an active debater. But, sir, my deep interest in the sufferings of the people of Cuba will not permit me longer to remain silent. I have not risen, however, to make a sensational speech, except only in so far as the naked and undorned facts in this case are in themselves extraordinary, startling, and sensational.

But if God will give me strength I shall make an American speech, for I love America as I love no other land. I love her people. I love her blooming hills. I love her smiling valleys. I love her rock-bound coasts. I love her rugged mountains. I love her deep and dark blue skies. And I love the name of liberty, for which American patriots shed their blood at King's Mountain, Lexington, and Bunker Hill. I love it so I would fain see the flag of freedom wave over every nation of the Western World.

Mr. Speaker, if I possessed the power to execute the decree, raising my hand to heaven in mute appeal to the God of Battles, I would issue this edict: "Cuba must and shall be free"—free as America, free as the air that is wafted from our mountain tops, "free as our torrents are that leap our rocks, free as our peaks that wear their caps of snow in the presence of the sun," and free as the American eagle, who, without asking leave, soars above the clouds in the clear regions of eternal sunshine, having no master save Him who is the Master of the storm. I wish from the bottom of my heart that Cuba may be as that proud bird having no master save Him who rides in the cyclone and directs the storm. Every inch and every ounce of me is American, "native here, and to the manner born."

If I should be cut up into little pieces no larger than the twenty-fifth division of an inch, every piece would be for freedom and America, yea, every fiber of my flesh from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet is for America. America first, America last, America and free Cuba forever! But I come claiming no monopoly of patriotism, no infallibility of judgment, and speak only as an obscure member of this Chamber. Let us view this question in the clear, cold light of reason—this important question, which may decide the destiny of nations and the fate of empires. Then let us ascertain what is the duty of Congress and the American people at this fateful hour in their history. The

time for irresolution has gone by; the time for parleying has passed; the time for diplomacy has departed, but the time for action is here—prompt, vigorous, and determined action.

I know not what course others may adopt; I know not what deduction or conclusion gentlemen may reach, but as for me my sentence is for "war." The only peace possible for the United States under existing circumstances is peace with dishonor. Give me an honorable peace or give me war! Sir, 70,000,000 people have risen in their wrath and said with the voice of a thousand thunders, "Give us peace with no disgrace to our manhood and no dishonor to our flag or give us death." These indignant millions will fight like tigers and, goaded by the memory of the *Maine*, will strike with sinews of steel and arms of iron. The battle cry in every engagement will be, "Soldiers, remember the *Maine*; charge!" And then such a charge as the world has seldom seen will shake the earth and drive the Spaniards flying from the field or leave them stretched upon the plain and weltering in their blood.

Sir, the message which the enraged people of the United States send greeting to Spain is this: "Heaven's unerring arm shall fall on you, and blood for blood our sailors' graves bedew." With the single exception of the money changer, the people of the United States from Maine to Texas are clamorous for the fray, and unless we declare war and give them a chance to avenge the death of our murdered sailors and wipe away the insult and dishonor from the American flag, they will curse the Fifty-fifth Congress till their latest breath, and coming to his last resting place pile bitter curses on McKinley's grave. Unless we strike this blow at once, the opportunity which the God of battles has placed before us will have passed away and our procrastination will have transferred to our enemies the supremacy of the sea.

A great poet has said, "There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune." Applying this language of Shakespeare to the matter under discussion, there is a tide in the affairs of nations which, taken at the flood, leads on to victory, but omitted, terminates in defeat and horrible disaster. Such a tide in the affairs of this nation is here to-day. The flood tide of American opportunity has rolled into port, bearing upon the bosom of the ocean the vessel with every sail unfurled and quivering in the breeze. Shall we, like wise and prudent men, embrace this God-given opportunity, or shall we, like thoughtless little children, lie supinely on our backs and by our inaction transfer to Spain the dominion of the sea? That is the question.

What are the facts in the case? Are they not that in consequence of the President's weak and vacillating policy Spain has outwitted us in diplomacy and caused disaster to our Navy? Sir, we have to deal with a foe, false, treacherous, and cowardly, who has committed such brutal butchery, such inhuman starvation of helpless babes and innocent children, and crimes, which the lips of modesty may not mention, as have shocked the civilized world and outraged every sense of common decency and humanity. Did not Minister de Lôme, having received the most flattering hospitality of the Chief Executive, afterwards write a private letter in which he characterized the President as a low politician, and did he not, in the person of the President, insult every American citizen?

The Administration, however, entered into slow negotiations demanding his recall, but before his passports were handed him

the Spanish minister cabled his resignation, which Spain promptly accepted, and Minister De Lôme left this country, not in disgrace as he ought to have done, but departed as a Spanish gentleman who was but temporarily sojourning here for his pleasure. Just as soon as the President heard of the incident, before saying one word to Spain, why did he not send the insulting Spaniard his passports immediately? If he had thus acted, we should have been spared the humiliation of seeing the insulter of this nation return to his native land with colors flying and received at home amid the applause of his admiring countrymen.

Furthermore, this policy has resulted in disaster to our Navy. It is the same ineffectual plan which was pursued by Mr. Cleveland; and the people all over this country, from the Allegheny to the Rocky Mountains, believe that the money power has dictated this shilly-shally, wishy-washy, namby-pamby policy. If Mr. Cleveland had acted with promptness, Cuba to-day would be free as America, enjoying the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. If that cotton string yonder in the White House, who bends this way or that at the behest of some power behind the throne, had exhibited in this crisis any backbone and acted with the promptness and courage becoming the President of a free and independent people, the battle ship *Maine* would not now be at the bottom of Havana Harbor, a melancholy wreck and a sad commentary upon this unfortunate talk-much-and-do-nothing policy. The 266 brave American sailors would not have become food for vultures and the hungry monsters of the deep, nor would the 300,000 unoffending men, women, and children have suffered the agonies of a horrible death by starvation.

Spain acts promptly, but, alas! alas! America vacillates, and dallies, and temporizes, and hedges, and haggles, and shifts, and doubles, and dickers, and potters, and parleys, and hesitates, and halts, and waits, and waits, and waits, and over the wreck of a battle ship and the graves of her dead sailors and dying thousands of the concentrados still waits and waits, waits for something to turn up when something has already turned up—disaster after disaster has turned up—nothing but defeat, disaster, and death. Defeat in diplomacy that causes the American cheek to blush with shame. Disaster to the best battle ship in the American Navy.

Disaster, death, and an untimely grave to 266 as brave seamen as ever walked a deck or spread a banner to the breeze, death and disaster to Cuban maidens and mothers, and starvation to hundreds of thousands of helpless women and innocent children. In the name of reason and common sense, in the name of all that is high and holy, shall we longer pursue a policy which has been attended only with defeat, disaster, and death? Ye immortal gods, speed the time when, with flying shot and shell, amid the red blaze of battle, with the roar of heavy artillery and the ten thousand thunders of American battle ships, the United States shall drive the Spaniards beyond the sea and give to bleeding Cuba her independence and freedom!

Mr. Speaker, I believe with all my soul that the wise course for Congress to adopt is to declare war, not next year, not next month, not next week, not to-morrow, but to-day. Sir, what is the situation? The Spanish torpedo squadron is now sailing across the ocean as fast as steam can drive her wheels. What does Spain want with torpedo boats at the Island of Porto Rico? Is that last of

Spain's misgoverned possessions of the Western Hemisphere in rebellion? Even if they were, they have no navy, and Spain could not use that flotilla against Porto Rico, because torpedo boats are only used for the destruction of ships.

Tell me, sir, what need has Spain for such a naval armament in her war against the Cuban insurgents? Cuba has no battle ship, no cruiser, nor any naval equipment whatsoever. Have the Spanish torpedo boats huge wings attached to their sides so that they can fly from place to place in Cuba and fight naval battles on the dry land? Who ever heard, since the world was made, of a naval engagement fought out on the solid, substantial earth? If her torpedo boats are thus curiously and ingeniously constructed, they would be of great service in the subjugation of insurgent subjects, and would be in demand by all the nations of the earth.

The flying squadron could poise in mid-air over a town and then turn loose such a destructive fire with Gatling guns on the doomed city below as to compel immediate surrender to the naval armament in the upper regions of the sky. Thus the boats could easily demolish one city, and then, flying amid the clouds, hover over another, and, razing that to the ground, leave it a pile of ruins, and, going from city to city, the dreadful armament could soon lay waste a kingdom or devastate an empire.

But everybody knows that Spain has no such boats, and only upon the supposition that they have wings would they be available in the prosecution of wars against rebellious subjects who have not a single battle ship. What, then, does Spain want with a torpedo squadron? What use can she make of torpedo boats in this hemisphere? In the language of the greatest of American orators, "They are meant for us. They can be meant for no other. It is in vain, sir, to extenuate the matter. Gentlemen cry peace, peace, but there is no peace. The war has actually begun." These torpedo boats at sea are comparatively harmless, but once landed they become formidable engines of destruction. For this reason our battle ships ought long ago to have met them on the high seas and sunk the last one of them to the bottom of the deep. Not to have done so under existing circumstances has been criminal delay and the crowning summit of human folly.

It is folly of such monstrous and prodigious size as to be amazing. How any man of sound mind would allow those formidable engines of destruction which are sent against us with hostile intent to make a long voyage across the sea without once raising his little finger to intercept and destroy them is strange, strange, surpassing strange! Sir, if that dreadful squadron is allowed to land and more of our battle ships are destroyed, those who are responsible will be held to a strict account, and the storm of the people's wrath will burst in pitiless and overwhelming fury on their heads. Lest he might lose a dollar in the event of war, the money changer eagerly clutches his bags of cankered gold and cries, "Peace, peace, peace; peace at all hazards; peace with dishonor; peace at any price!"

He looks so saintly and seems so divine, butter would not melt in his mouth. His hands are so clean they would not stain a lily's cheek, and his soul so pure it would not soil the whitest plume that ever adorned a seraph's wing. But for his unholy greed of ill-gotten gain, one would think he was an angel fresh from the court of heaven, sent down to earth as minister plenipotentiary and envoy extraordinary of peace at any price. Away, away with that

base and groveling idea of peace with dishonor. It is a sentiment which is unworthy of a first-class monkey and at which a toad frog would turn up his nose. Is not a money changer greater than a monkey and more noble than a toad? Mr. Speaker, this Government has truckled to Spain and licked the feet of the money power in the vain attempt to negotiate the Spanish-Cuban bond deal until we are branded as cowards. This vile epithet is applied to us at home and abroad. As showing the red-hot indignation of the people and the necessity for an immediate declaration of war, I read a clipping from the *Washington Times*, March 31, 1898, as follows:

NEWPORT, R. I., *March 30, 1898.*

There is much excitement in Newport to-day over the acts of unknown persons who last night, under cover of darkness, hung President McKinley in effigy on an electric pole near the Liberty tree. The police cut the dummy down and found it bearing this inscription: "William McKinley—Coward—Newport citizens." Law-abiding citizens have demanded that the police search for the offenders and have them prosecuted.

I have also read in the papers that in Colorado the people not only hung President McKinley in effigy, but after cutting down the dummy, cremated him, and his ashes were scattered to the winds. In this state of public indignation, unless war is declared, if our people are to be prosecuted for calling Mr. McKinley a coward, indictments will have to be preferred against 70,000,000 of people.

You will have to indict every man, woman, and child in the United States, and when Gabriel's trumpet shall sound to call men to judgment there will be cases still pending in court. Sir, we have betaken ourselves to flight and stained the glory of our flag with cowardice when confronted with no more formidable a foe than poor little bankrupt Spain; a second-class navy, not so much, a third-rate power, a nation which for three long years has utterly failed to suppress Gomez and his little handful of ragged followers. In showing the white feather under these humiliating circumstances with no greater foe than that bankrupt nation, we have achieved the great glory and the imperishable renown of being called cowards and made the laughingstock of the world. Shame, shame, a blistering and eternal shame!

I repeat it, sir, I am for war. If such a disaster had happened to an English vessel or to the cruiser of any nation on earth, within forty-eight hours it would have leveled Morro Castle to the ground. Sir, I want our Government to give notice to all the world, from the burning tropics to the frozen poles, that whatever nation insults our flag and murders American sailors in their beds and ushers them before their Maker without time to breathe a parting prayer will have showered upon her capital the red-hot shot and shell of American artillery and the 10,000 thunders of American battle ships. What! Are American citizens no better than common curs or wild beasts, that they should be butchered to make a Spanish holiday, and shall this great Government do no more than if so many dogs had been slain? "Forbid it, heaven! Forbid it, Almighty God!"

If while sleeping peacefully beneath the folds of his country's flag the American citizen is to be blown to atoms by dynamite; if he is to be butchered like a bull to make a Spanish holiday and this great Government shall do no more than if a dog had been killed, where is the boasted glory and protection of the American flag? He had as well tie a little rag to a stick and let it wave



above his head as to unfurl that proud banner which hangs above the Speaker's chair, for in such a case one would afford as much protection as the other.

Who, sir, would care to be an American, who take pride in his country's flag, or who enlist in our Army and Navy, when it is known all over the wide world that the United States permits her loyal citizens to be butchered in cold blood like so many wild beasts? And yet the Government sits silently by and simply raises her hands in holy horror at the awful thought that war would hurt the business of the bondholders and the interest of the money changers. Oh, Dishonor, Dishonor, then wilt thou have come to the United States and perched upon the American flag! Sir, if this is the treatment which I and my fellow-men are to receive at the hands of this great nation, "I had rather be a dog, and bay the moon," "I had rather be a toad, and live upon the vapours of a dungeon," than to be an American citizen.

But, sir, it is a proud distinction to be an American, and the lives of the humblest American citizens who toil in the shop or hold the plow handles are more sacred than if they were so many dogs or swine. It was Lamartine who said, "Man is a fallen angel, carrying about with him pleasant memories of heaven." The poorest man that ever trod the earth has that about him which compels my respect, for he bears upon his person, though in poverty and rags, the dismantled semblance of the Invisible, and stamped upon his brow by unalterable decree is the indestructible and eternal image of God. That image, though dismantled and defiled, should command respect. Blind is the man who sees not in the humblest beggar and vilest tramp that which gilds his rags and makes his poverty divine—the blurred lineaments but still ineffaceable image of the great I Am.

Though our sailors who went down to death were humble men, unknown to wealth or fame, this Government should defend them and protect their widows and orphans just as if they had been United States Senators. Members of Congress, or gifted orators with power to command the admiration of the multitude and the applause of listening senates. The cries of their widows and orphans ring in our ears, and the pale, cold lips of those dead sailors, with mute but matchless eloquence, speak to us from the grave. I love my wife, I love my children, I love my country, I love my fellow-man, and I love the poor, starving Cubans, struggling for independence and freedom, and when their lives and liberties are endangered by a foreign or domestic foe I will raise this arm and voice in their defense, so help me Almighty God.

Sir, if the time has come when the American flag does not protect and defend American citizens, soldiers, and sailors butchered like wild beasts to make a Spanish holiday, then haul that banner down, for the stains of dishonor will be wrapped within its folds. Take it from the Dome of the Capitol, where it flutters in the breeze, for "cowards" inscribed upon the stripes will dim the glory of all the stars. Hide it, hide it, for the American will blush to own it, and the foreigner will scorn it and spit upon it. Drape it in mourning, for its brightest hopes are dead and its boasted glory gone. Furl it, furl it, and never let it wave again, for the God-gone of Liberty will weep to see it, and hang her head in shame.

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